

St. James The Less Roman Catholic Church  
1225 East Eager Street  
Baltimore (Independent City)  
~~(no country)~~  
Maryland

HABS No. MD- 969

HABS  
MD,  
4-BALT,  
175-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
MD,  
4-BALT,  
175-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
ST. JAMES THE LESS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AND RECTORY

HABS NO. MD- 969

Location: 1225 East Eager Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202  
Southeast corner of Aisquith Street at  
Eager Street  
Ward 10, Block 1207, Lot 66  
7th Congressional District  
Baltimore City (no county), Maryland

USGS Baltimore East Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 18.361860.435123

Present Owner: Redemptorists  
C/O Father John Murray  
St. Mary's Church  
109 Duke of Gloucester Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Present Occupant: Vacant

Significance: As a building designated in the High Victorian Gothic style with Romanesque Revival overtones, the St. James The Less Roman Catholic Church is an example of a type of architecture that was commonly used in Baltimore in the second half of the nineteenth century for church structures, although this church is an unusual example in that it is constructed of brick rather than the more commonly used stone, particularly for buildings of similar size and lavish treatment. The structure achieves additional significance as an early work of George A. Frederick (1842-1924), a prolific and prominent architect in Baltimore who designed buildings of all types, mainly in the Baltimore area, but also across the state. The craftsmanship of the period is apparent in the detailing of the building itself as well as in the stained glass windows from the studios of Josef Mayer in New York and Germany; three large interior murals painted about 1886 by the German-born artist William Lamprecht, and marble sculpture work by the Baltimore sculptor Josef Martin Didusch. There is an associated four story Rectory.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1865-1867. The cornerstone of the Church was laid on October 22, 1865 and the Church was dedicated on December 22, 1867. The Rectory was constructed in August of 1867, however no dates are available for the later remodeling and modernizing.
2. Architect: George Aloysius Frederick (1842-1924). George A. Frederick was one of the leading architects of mid and late nineteenth century Baltimore. St. James was one of his early works. George A. Frederick achieved prominence for his works in Baltimore, but also designed buildings around the State of Maryland. Among Frederick's other works are the Baltimore City Hall and the Cylburn Mansion (both on the National Register of Historic Places), as well as several pavilions in Druid Hill Park, also listed on the National Register.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Redemptorists, C/O Father John Murray, St. Mary's Church, 109 Duke of Gloucester Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information found.
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans have been located.
6. Alterations and additions: The Rectory, which housed offices, a priest's residence and other church functions, was added to the Church structure in August, 1867. It has been substantially remodeled and modernized.

B. Historical context:

The St. James Church was designed by George A. Frederick, one of the leading architects of mid and late nineteenth century Baltimore. Among Frederick's other works are the Baltimore City Hall (still in use today) and the Cylburn Mansion (both on the National Register of Historic Places), as well as several pavilions in Druid Hill Park, also listed on the National Register. Prominently sited at a major intersection on a hill, the Church is an imposing neighborhood landmark. The 256 foot tower is visible for miles around.

Incorporated into the building are several works of art that lend additional significance; the huge stained glass windows were fashioned in the studios of Josef Mayer, a major producer of stained glass in both Germany and the United States. He operated studios in both Munich and New York. (Mayer windows could once be found in the nearby St. John's Church. They were removed when that building became a community center.) The three large murals at the East end of the Church were painted about 1886 by artist William Lamprecht. They depict the "Martyrdom of St. James", the "Annunciation" and the "Death of St. Joseph". According to the Thieme-Becker Art Encyclopedia, Lamprecht was born near Wurzburg, Bavaria, was trained in Munich and came to America around 1870. He specialized in wall and ceiling murals, mostly of religious themes for churches. His works appear in cathedrals and churches in Boston, Brooklyn, Cincinnati, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. Lamprecht returned to Munich in 1901. He was still living in 1920.

The marble altar rail and the marble statuary are the work of Baltimore sculptor Josef Martin Didusch (1853-1928). Among his other works are capitals and other architectural decorations in the Library of Congress, as well as a desk for Pope Leo XIII, a statue of George Calvert at Calvert Hall College in Baltimore, and a wealth of architectural decorations and religious and secular statuary throughout the eastern United States.

The monumental organ, perched in the main loft at the West end of the Church, was constructed in Baltimore in 1868 by the master organ builder August Pomplitz at his shop at Pratt and Albemarle Streets. (The shop is no longer standing.) The organ is a relic of the heyday of Baltimore organ-building, and it was made by one of the leading exponents of the craft. (For more information on Pomplitz and Baltimore organ building see "Baltimore Organs and Organ Building" by Thomas S. Eader in Maryland Historical Magazine Volume 65 Number 3, Fall 1970.)

The four bells in the tower were cast by Henry McShane and Company of Baltimore, a firm specializing in bell-foundry. There has never been more than a handful of foundries making large bells in the United States. The McShane Foundry, begun in 1856 and still in operation is the only surviving one. Consequently, from its start it has manufactured large bells for churches, universities,

etc., throughout the country. The bells in St. James are quite large, weighing 2100 pounds, 2600 pounds, 3400 pounds and 5000 pounds each.

The St. James parish, founded in 1833 originally served a mixed population of German and Irish immigrants. By 1841 the German population in the neighborhood had increased greatly and the Irish population center had shifted closer to the Jonestown area of Baltimore. Therefore, the St. Vincent parish on Front Street was created out of the English-speaking segment of St. James; St. James was designated to serve the German-speaking population and was placed under the ministry of the Redemptorist order, under whose ministry it remains today.

By the early 1860's the number of parishioners had grown well beyond the capacity of the old church, and plans were made for construction of the present facility. The cornerstone was laid on October 22, 1865 and the building was dedicated on December 22, 1867.

Through the years the church sponsored a large number of philanthropic services, social groups, cultural activities and even a savings and loan association for the neighborhood. Among the prominent business and civic leaders associated with St. James were Louis Dohme, co-founder of the Sharp and Dohme pharmaceutical company (who became Merck, Sharp and Dohme), and brewers George Brehm and Thomas Beck. On the front wall of the church there are two plaques bearing the names of members of the church who served in both World Wars.

By the 1960's most of the Catholic German-Americans and Irish-Americans had moved out of the area and had been replaced by a mostly non-Catholic black population. In 1966, the nearby church of Saint John the Evangelist, a one-time major Irish parish founded in 1853, was forced to close because of dwindling numbers and was merged into St. James forming the present-day parish of St. James and St. John's.

In 1984, because of a lack of parishioners and because the facility was outmoded, the structure was abandoned.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. James The Less Roman Catholic Church is an 1865-1867 high Victorian Gothic influenced brick structure with Romanesque Revival overtones, a tall central tower rising out of the facade or West elevation, and an ornate interior with marble sculpture and murals. The facade of the church has round arch recessed panels with round arch windows and pointed bichromal surrounds created by alternating stone and brick treatment, and a miniature round arch corbeling under the eaves of the roof and in the facade of the tower. The rectory, added to the main sanctuary in August of 1867, is a three story hip roofed brick structure with a massive Colonial Revival influenced stone entrance frontispiece, simple cornice under the roof, and round arch windows with new rectangular windows inserted, fronts on Eager Street, but is attached to the church.
2. Condition of fabric: The exterior brick masonry is sound and the roof is in need of repair. The interiors have been neglected and are decaying badly.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 138 feet along West or Aisquith Street side; 210 feet along North or Eager Street, 138 feet on East and 213 feet on the South.
2. Foundations: Brick walls resting on stone foundations, of varying thicknesses. Soil consists of orangish-tan to light brown fine to coarse sandy clay with a trace of gravel. Groundwater is found at 28.9 feet.
3. Walls: The exterior is built of brick (all stretcher bond on front, common bond on sides), and highlighted by polychrome brick and stone trim.
4. Structural system, framing: The floor of the main sanctuary is select long leaf yellow pine joists bearing on solid brick walls throughout the structure. The sanctuary roof is bridge type heavy timber trusses approximately 21 feet on center with 2" X 12" joist at bottom chord. The rectory is long leaf yellow pine

joists bearing on solid brick walls with concrete topping in selected areas.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There are no porches; stoops are limestone over concrete; there are no balconies or bulkheads.
6. Chimneys; There is one solid brick chimney located at the Southeast corner of the building extending approximately thirty feet.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front doors to the church are extruded aluminum with glass panels. The remainder of the doors to the church are solid wood in existing jambs.

The center portal is set approximately six feet into the base of the steeple, while the other two entrances are closer to the skin surface of the main body of the church; thus the immense mass and strength of the steeple's base is articulated and differentiated from the more flat treatment of the building's surface. Each portal is further highlighted with a brick arch in a bichrome pattern imitative of a stone arch; inside each of the portal arches is a set of large wooden double doors topped by a half rose window in the tympanum.

- b. Windows and shutters: Windows in the main sanctuary are painted/glazed art glass with brick jambs and arched openings. Sills are sand stone. The windows in the rectory are one-over-one aluminum windows with storm sash. There were wooden windows at one time, but no date for replacement was found.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The roof of the main sanctuary is single pitch slate. The roof of the rectory is hipped slate.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: There is a composite cornice of molded brick and wood trim.

- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There is a steeple tower that is an octagonal pinnacle over a square brick base that is flanked by four dormer styled ventilating openings supported by a clock tower structure, which is in turn supported by the main steeple tower, which is engaged to the main body of the church.

On the steeple, well above the entrance but still below the level of the roof peak is a characteristically Romanesque pair of round-top windows inside the arch with a bulls-eye in the tympanum. Further above, beyond the roof peak, the paired window motif is repeated, but much more elaborately. Since it is above the roof of the church, it appears on all four sides of the tower. The openings are not glazed but are screened with louvers and there are block faces in the tympana. The arches are of the same bichrome brick pattern as the arches below, and the whole arrangement is surrounded by textured brick surfaces and topped by a corbel table. Over each corner is a pinnacle; the pinnacles surround an octagonal spire punctuated by four tall brick dormers, each dormer resting on the brick tower wall below.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a basement in the East end of the church, but at the West end it becomes an unexcavated crawl space. There is a basement in the rectory as well, primarily used for storage, with the exception of one large room that has been converted to a large kitchen (circa 1950) used for church functions.
- b. First floor: The interior of the church is one large rectangular space. There is no system of nave and aisles in the spatial organization of the structure, but the pews are arranged so that there are two side aisles and a large center aisle. There is no clerestory, and except for a few pillars at the rear supporting an organ loft, the space is free of pillars, piers, or other interruptions.



In the center of the Eastern wall a large arch opens into a semi-circular domed apse. At the Western end are the organ loft and two small choir lofts above. Along both the Northern and Southern walls are six large stained glass windows, each about 30 feet tall; at the lofts there is a smaller window in each wall. Between the windows, pilasters seem to support the quarter-round ribs that lead to the framework of the five-part coffered ceiling.

- c. The rectory contains three floors that are identical in layout. (see sketch)
2. Stairways: There is a stairway in the Northwest corner that leads up approximately 30 feet to the choir loft. There is also a stairway in the Southwest corner that leads up to the choir loft. Both are wood, cantilevered curving stairways. These stairways connect to a wooden stairway that works its way up to the bell tower, approximately 200 feet high. In the rectory there is a wooden stairway in the Southeast corner starting on the ground level and going up to the third floor. There is also a stairway in the Northeast corner of the main sanctuary on the exterior wall; in the interior wall of the rectory. This stairway begins in the basement of the rectory to the third floor, thence connects into the attic of the main sanctuary.
3. Flooring: The floor of the main sanctuary is wood joist with tongue and groove pine, then a mud base and ceramic tile. In the rectory, the floor is wood joist with tongue and groove pine and a skim coat of concrete.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls of the main sanctuary are brick covered by decorative plaster. The vaulted ceiling is hung from the attic joist and covered with decorative plaster. There is wainscoting of one inch thick Vermont marble around the main sanctuary. The walls are plaster applied directly on brick. There is plaster floral trim on pilasters and religious theme murals painted directly onto the plaster. Walls in the rectory are plaster over lath; the ceiling is also plaster over lath.

5. Openings:

- a. The front doors to the church are extruded aluminum with glass panels. The remainder of the doors to the church are solid wood in existing jambs. The entrance doors to the rectory are extruded aluminum with glass panels and the remainder of the doors are wood.
- b. Windows: The windows in the main sanctuary are painted/glazed art glass with brick jambs and arched openings. Sills are sand stone. The windows in the rectory are one-over-one aluminum windows with storm sash. There were wood windows at one time, but no date for replacement was found.

6. Decorative features and trim: Decorative features consist of the Stations of the Cross, a carved wood side pulpit and ornate precast plaster trim on the walls, with a complex ceiling of vaults and arches.

7. Hardware: All hardware existing is standard lockset and passage set, circa 1960.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: There is an oil, low pressure steam heating system which supplies radiators in the rectory. There are a few cast iron radiators located in the main sanctuary as well.
- b. Lighting: In the main sanctuary there are mercury vapor lights that have been fitted into the existing plaster ceiling. In the rectory, there are standard incandescent fixtures throughout the living spaces.
- c. Plumbing: There is one water closet and sink in the Southwest front corner under the stairs of the main sanctuary, circa 1955. In the rectory there are men and women toilet rooms on the first, second, and third floors, installed circa 1950. There is also a sink in the kitchen on the first floor of the rectory and a sink in the basement of the rectory.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main sanctuary is situated on an East West axis. The entrance is to the West, the altar is located at the East side of the building. The stained glass windows are along the South and North walls of the main sanctuary. The rectory is along the East end running on an axis South to North. There is a large courtyard in the Northwest quadrant of the lot.

Since Aisquith Street slopes downhill South of Eager Street, there is a level terrace of concrete paving between the sidewalk and the portals of the church. This terrace is separated from the sidewalk by granite curbing, and it is entered by three granite steps which are directly in front of each of the three portals of the church. Old photographs show an iron picket fence anchored in the granite curbing, but this has been removed.

2. Historic landscape design: The church and rectory cover a high percentage of the site and any original landscaping would have been destroyed with subsequent street improvements.
3. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: We have no information as to the original drawings. We do know that the architect was Douglas A. Frederick.
- B. Early Views: We have no historic photographs or engravings of the structure.
- C. Interviews: Telephone interview with Father Paul Thomas, Archivist for the Archdiocese of Baltimore on March 14, 1988.
- D. Bibliography:
  1. Primary and unpublished sources: "Centenary" St. James Church, Baltimore.

"Maryland Historical Sites Inventory"; Baltimore City (B-3608), Annapolis, Maryland.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Cunz, Dieter; The Maryland Germans; Princeton University Press; 1948.

Eader, Thomas S.; "Baltimore Organs and Organ Building"; Maryland Historical Magazine; Volume 65 Number 3 (Fall, 1970).

Scharf, J. Thomas; History of Baltimore City and County; Louis H. Everts; Philadelphia; 1881.

Thieme, Ulrich & Felix Becker; Allegemeines Lexikon Der Bilbenden Kunstler; E.A. Seeman; Leipzig; 1920.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: We have no other sources of information.

F. Supplemental Material: None

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

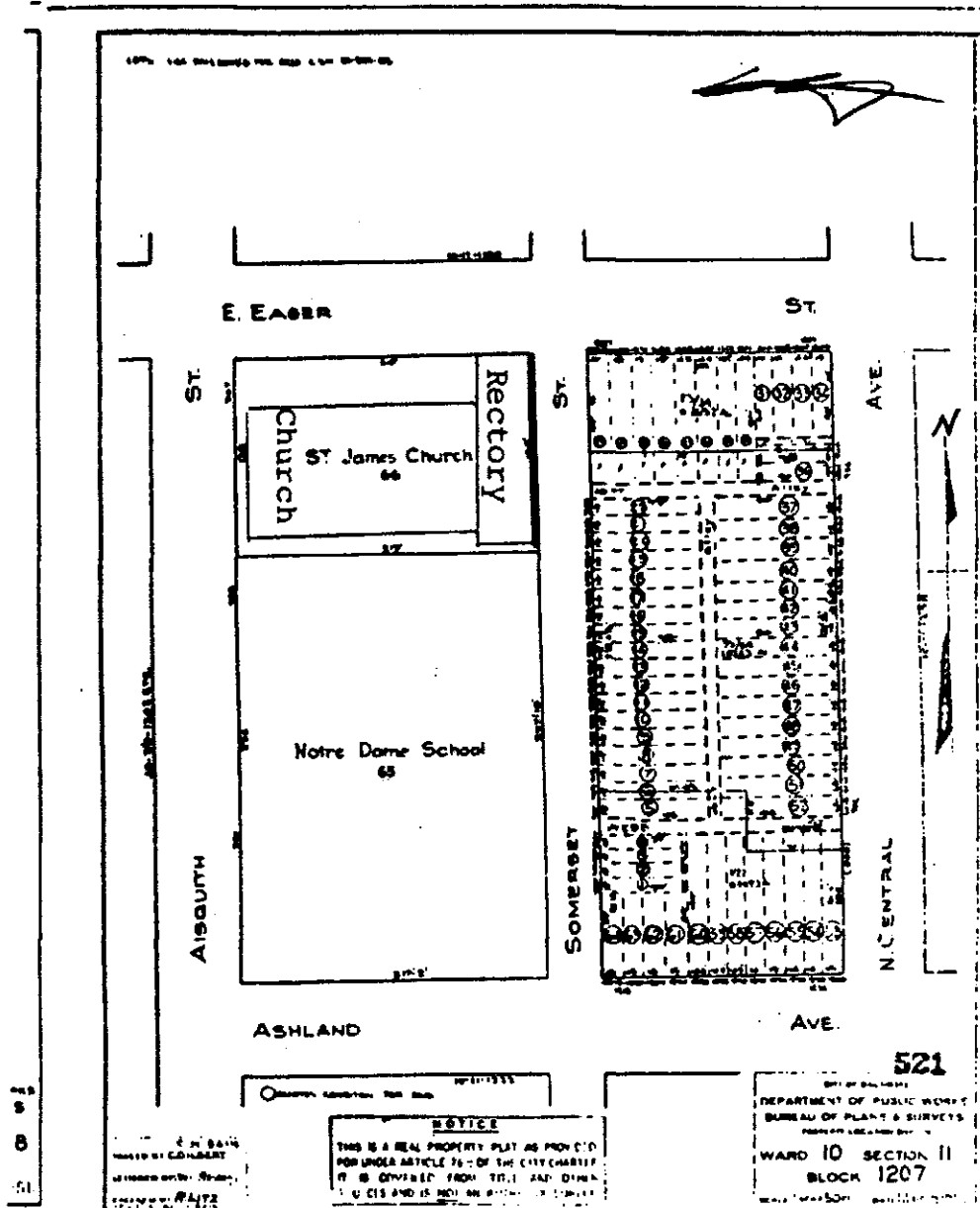
Contract Purchaser:

Marc A. Horwitz  
Suite 326  
34 Market Place  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

St. James Church and Rectory will be converted into 73 housing units for the elderly with complete access for the handicapped.

The exterior of the church will remain essentially as it is, including retaining the steeple. The only visible change will occur with the removal of the existing stained glass windows and the insertion of casement panel windows to fit the existing openings, and the installation of a ramp at the front entrance on Aisquith Street for handicapped access.

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